



Returning to work

brainstrust information sheet

Know Hows are published by *brainstrust* to help people living with a brain tumour to understand current topics. They are produced with input from relevant scientific and clinical experts and are written in a way that should help you to understand often complicated topics.

If you have an idea for a Know How, then please let us know.

If you have any queries, don't forget you can talk to one of our support specialists on **01983 292 405** or email **hello@brainstrust.org.uk**.

Why do we need this know How?

There are many reasons why you might be returning to work. This Know How is written to encompass either illness or bereavement. Returning to work can be a big step in recovery. It can bring a sense of normality, stability, routine and social contact. But we also know that people are daunted by returning to work. This is due to a variety of reasons:

1. They aren't sure what people will know about their condition
2. They worry they aren't up to the job.
3. They worry that they won't be able to control their emotions.
4. They feel like a change in job.
5. They may still be suffering from side effects.

Evidence

In 2018 a Macmillan survey showed that 85% of people living with cancer who were employed at the time of diagnosis felt it was important for them to continue work after being diagnosed with cancer. Responses included those who answered 'very important' (68%) and 'fairly important' (17%).

www.macmillan.org.uk/_images/working-through-cancer_tcm9-341781.pdf

What does this mean?

It means that it is important you get the support you need if you are thinking about returning to work after being diagnosed with a brain tumour. As soon as you are diagnosed with cancer, you are protected as a disabled person by the Equality Act 2010. In Northern Ireland, you're protected by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. This means your employer must make any reasonable adjustments needed to allow you to continue working. For example, they might allow you to change your working hours or use your sick leave allowance for hospital appointments. If you have had time off work and are thinking of going back, you may want to think about the following.

Preparation

- Keeping in Touch days – these are useful to keep in touch, perhaps attend the odd meeting or training, and prepare for your return to work. Agree the days ahead of time with your manager.
- Ask if you can start off with just a few hours, gradually building up your hours when you feel able to.
- Planning your return – choose a suitable date, what hours you'll work; try to schedule your return to allow a period of settling in/building up hours.
- Communicate your return in advance so that people aren't surprised when you walk through the door.
- Give people guidance about what to say, if anything, about your diagnosis. This helps your work colleagues and means that you can 'own' the conversation.

Starting back at work

- Catching up – schedule in time to get a handover from the person that has been covering your role, arrange to meet with your manager as well as your team/co-workers. Be practical – it won't be possible to read every email that's been sent in your absence. Focus on using your co-workers to fill you in, and reading the most recent communications.
- Setting new goals – your priorities may have changed since being away. Set a meeting with your boss after a couple of weeks to set and agree new goals.
- Ask for help – it's OK to ask for help. Use your first period back at work to do so – people will understand and often will be happy to support you.
- Expect setbacks and don't be hard on yourself.

Practicalities

- Back-up care/cover (if carer) – have a plan in place about what to do for emergency cover. If possible, arrange for someone else to provide this in the first period to ease your transition back.
- Organise things at home to simplify chores – for example, having help where possible, buying easy meals, having realistic expectations of yourself (e.g. not needing to have the house look perfect).
- Don't rush – if possible, take a gradual approach to returning to work, building up hours over a few weeks. Make time to look after yourself.

Ask yourself

- What specifically are you struggling with?
- What would help you to prepare?
- How could you make it easier?
- Who's in your team?
- What's your skill set?
- What's changed for you?
- What are your next steps?

Contact

Talk to *brainstrust*. We can help.
You can call, write, type, text.

Email for help and support:
hello@brainstrust.org.uk

Telephone: **01983 292 405**

Other helpful links

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/organising/work-and-cancer/information-for-employees/going-back-to-work.html

www.maggiescentres.org/how-maggies-can-help/help-available/practical-support/returning-to-work-after-cancer

www.workingwithcancer.co.uk

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Production of *brainstrust*'s information is supported by the Anna Horrell fund. Anna, wife and mum, tragically passed away in August 2017 after a valiant fight against a glioblastoma. Throughout her life and her illness, she was an inspiration to us all, fighting bravely and cheerfully in the face of adversity. She was the beating heart of our family, and her loss left a hole in our lives that can never be replaced. In her incredible memory, we are passionate about helping others diagnosed with a brain tumour to navigate this most difficult of journeys.

Mike, Tom, Rebecca, Charlie & Sophie